

Pauline Curnier Jardin YOU THINK YOU ARE WITHIN IN ME NOW

6.2 – 29.03.2018

Mixing pop culture with elements of Surrealism, Pauline Curnier Jardin's theatrical films take history or myth as their points of departure and use improvisation, excessive characters and strange forms to create a narrative patchwork. She often works with the same troupe of dancers, performers, and the costume and set designer Rachel Garcia, to do so.

Since 2007 she has been the Captain in *Les Vraoums*, a dada queer recital. In 2015–16 she was a resident at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam. Most recently, Curnier Jardin participated in the 57th Venice Biennale and presented a selection of her films at Tate Modern (London). She has also shown at Performa 15 (New York), Palais de Tokyo (Paris), MIT List Visual Arts Center (Cambridge), ZKM (Karlsruhe), FUTURA (Prague), Museum of Contemporary Art (São Paulo) and Musée d'Art Moderne (Paris).

What follows are excerpts from the bright essay 'Caving in, or the eyeful tower', written by Professor John C. Welchman within the framework of the limited-edition vinyl that will be issued on behalf of this exhibition, revising the soundscape of the film *Grotta Profunda, the moody chasm* (2011-2017).

"*Grotta Profunda* begins in a crypto-documentary mode, its black-and-white images of the wandering, self-interrogatory teenager, Bernadette Soubirous shot on location in the French Pyrenees in the vicinity of her apparitions near the town of Lourdes in 1858. Accentuating the body and face of the future saint (she was beatified in 1925 and canonized eight years later in the pontificate of Pius XI), the declension of these sequences recalls Carl Theodor Dreyer's masterpiece of physiognomic cinema, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928), which was framed as an investigation into the corporeal impress of metaphysical experience, layered with questions of gender, theological disputation, and tenacity in the face of intimidating patriarchal power.

The second and longer part of the 30-minute video is transacted inside Curnier Jardin's allegorically reconfigured variant of the cave-grotto at Massabielle where Bernadette's revelations took place. This interior space is made over as a bodily cavity, a belly, or a parody of the immaculate uterus at the centre of the Marian dialectic of purity and procreation that structures Bernadette's visionary encounters and has underwrit-

ten her devotional legacy. Here the protagonist is confronted by, or projects, a cryptically mad-cap menagerie of composite figures, answering in apocryphal twenty-first century terms to the congregations of hybrid human and demonic forms present in the Christian tradition as ecclesiastical marginalia (on misericords, at the edges of manuscripts, in gargoyles, corbels and capitals in the remoter reaches of Catholic architectures): an alternately naked and latex-clad Venus of Willendorf who scuttles across the cavern floor as a crab-woman and doubles-up as a semaphore for Death; a hermaphroditic monkey-cum-mermaid, betokening a conjugation of lust, evolutionary regression and the mythography of female embodiment; a long-hair Jesus, introduced as a cod-piece or personified fig-leaf; and Vanilla and Chocolate, a brace of "disco-crazy gay ice-cream gigolos" who act out a demotically cross-dressed pantomime of Original Sin as an Expulsion from their dairy Eden."

"If the logic of physiognomy (and the final image) of *Grotta Profunda* are scrambled and inverted, in *Teetotum* (2017) the discourse dies an extended and lingering death along with the heads and faces on which it depends. As with the earlier project, Curnier Jardin combines historical reference with the machinations of a carnivalesque group, only in *Teetotum* the participants belong to one of the few sanctioned entities in popular culture specifically given over to the practice of corporeal excess, slapstick

humour, and gymnastic finesse: the circus. As, again, with *Grotta Profunda*, the artist draws on and expands an earlier work that takes off from a specific historical event, here *Blutbad Parade* (*Bloodbath Parade*, 2014), filmed on location in Karlsruhe, Germany, where a nascent French air force bombed a circus “big top” during a performance in 1916 resulting in mass civilian casualties. *Teetotum* focuses on the performative mannerisms of the young acrobats—postmodern reincarnations, perhaps, of the *saltimbanques* represented by Picasso around 1905—particularly their work with coloured hoops which they rotate around their torsos and necks. Within a general theory of facial objectification, Fernand Léger opened up an interrogatory space between the facial denominations of the circus, particularly the face of the clown (“a multi-coloured face, an eye, a nose, a mouth that doesn’t look like a nose, a mouth, an eye any longer”) and the facial orders of the spectators who come to see it. With *Twilight Zone* insouciance, Curnier Jardin converts objectification into capital calamity as the rings cut into the performers’ skin and they are finally garrotted by their props. Jugglers are wiped out through the jugular in a chilling allegory of collateral damage.”

Works on show:

The Hand, 2017

Sculpture, mixed media, approx. 3 x 4 m

Grotta Profunda, the moody chasm, 2011-2017

Single channel film, sound, colour, 30'

Grotta Profunda (The Atmosphere), 2011

Ink and acrylic on paper, framed, 152 x 158 cm

Teetotum, 2017

Single channel film, sound, colour, 3'

Let us know if you want to be informed about the release of the vinyl (Spring 2018): Stijn.Maes@pxl.be

¹ Johanna Zinecker, *Labor Berlin 12: Drifting* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2012).

² *Teetotum* was commissioned by Frieze Projects, first screened at Frieze London 2017 and had its broadcast premiere as part of Random Acts, Channel 4 (UK), at midnight 7 November 2017.

³ Fernand Léger, “The Circus” (1950), in *Functions of Painting*, trans. Alexandra Anderson (New York: Viking, 1973), 175. Welchman discusses Léger’s theories of facial objectification in popular culture, film and painting in “Face, Mask, Profile: From Affect to Object in the Work of Henri Matisse and Fernand Léger,” chapter 3 of *After the Wagnerian Bouillabaisse: Essays on European Art 1900-80* (Berlin: Sternberg, forthcoming 2018).